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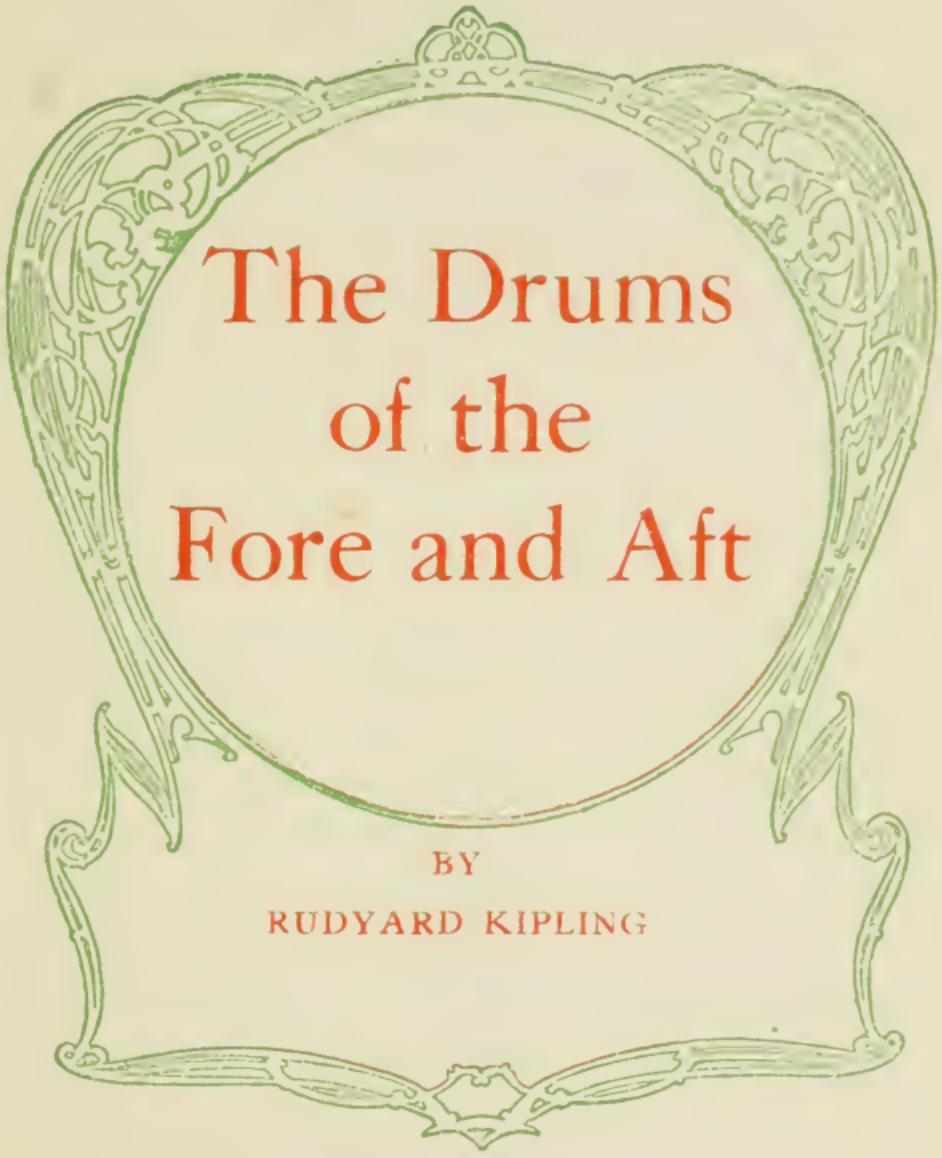
THE DRUMS OF
THE FORE
AND AFT

KENEDY

RUDOLF CREE

WORCESTER

MICHIGAN



The Drums of the Fore and Aft

BY
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HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

THE DRUMS OF THE FORE AND AFT.

IN the Army List they still stand as "The Fore and Fit Princess Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen - Auspach's Merther - Tydfilshire Own Royal Loyal Light Infantry, Regimental District 329 A," but the army through all its barracks and canteens knows them now as the "Fore and Aft." They may in time do something that shall make their new title honorable, but at present they are bitterly ashamed, and the man who calls them "Fore and Aft" does so at the risk of the head which is on his shoulders.

Two words breathed into the stables of a certain cavalry regiment will bring the men out into the streets with belts and mops and bad language; but a whisper of "Fore and Aft" will bring out this regiment with rifles.

Their one excuse is that they came again

and did their best to finish the job in style. But for a time all their world knows that they were openly beaten, whipped, dumb-cowed, shaking and afraid. The men know it; their officers know it; the Horse Guards know it; and when the next war comes the enemy will know it also. There are two or three regiments of the line that have a black mark against their names which they will then wipe out, and it will be excessively inconvenient for the troops upon whom they do their wiping.

The courage of the British soldier is officially supposed to be above proof, and, as a general rule, it is so. The exceptions are decently shoved out of sight, only to be referred to in the freshest of unguarded talk that occasionally swamps a mess-table at midnight. Then one hears strange and horrible stories of men not following their officers, of orders being given by those who had no right to give them, and of disgrace that, but for the standing luck of the British Army, might have ended in brilliant disas-

ter. These are unpleasant stories to listen to, and the messes tell them under their breath, sitting by the big wood fires, and the young officer bows his head and thinks to himself, please God, his men shall never behave unhandily.

The British soldier is not altogether to be blamed for occasional lapses; but this verdict he should not know. A moderately intelligent general will waste six months in mastering the craft of the particular war that he may be waging; a colonel may utterly misunderstand the capacity of his regiment for three months after it has taken the field; and even a company commander may err and be deceived as to the temper and temperament of his own handful; wherefore the soldier, and the soldier of to-day more particularly, should not be blamed for falling back. He should be shot or hanged afterwards—*pour encourager les autres*—but he should not be vilified in newspapers, for that is want of tact and waste of space.

He has, let us say, been in the service of

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the empress for, perhaps, four years. He will leave in another two years. He has no inherited morals, and four years are not sufficient to drive toughness into his fibre, or to teach him how holy a thing is his regiment. He wants to drink, he wants to enjoy himself—in India he wants to save money—and he does not in the least like getting hurt. He had received just sufficient education to make him understand half the purport of the orders he receives, and to speculate on the nature of clean, incised, and shattering wounds. Thus, if he is told to deploy under fire preparatory to an attack, he knows that he runs a very great risk of being killed while he is deploying, and suspects that he is being thrown away to gain ten minutes' time. He may either deploy with desperate swiftness, or he may shuffle, or bunch, or break, according to the discipline under which he has lain for four years.

Armed with imperfect knowledge, cursed with the rudiments of an imagination, hampered by the intense selfishness of the lower

classes, and unsupported by any regimental associations, this young man is suddenly introduced to an enemy who in eastern lands is always ugly, generally tall and hairy, and frequently noisy. If he looks to the right and the left and sees old soldiers—men of twelve years' service, who, he knows, know what they are about—taking a charge, rush, or demonstration without embarrassment he is consoled, and applies his shoulder to the butt of his rifle with a stout heart. His peace is the greater if he hears a senior, who has taught him his soldiering and broken his head on occasion, whispering: “They'll shout and carry on like this for five minutes, then they'll rush in, and then we've got 'em by the short hairs!”

But, on the other hand, if he sees only men of his own term of service, turning white and playing with their triggers and saying: “What the hell's up now?” while the company commanders are sweating into their sword-hilts and shouting: “Front-rank, fix bayonets! Steady there—steady!

Sight for three hundred—no, for five! Lie down, all! Steady! Front-rank, kneel!" and so forth, he becomes unhappy; and grows acutely miserable when he hears a comrade turn over with the rattle of fire-irons falling over the fender, and the grunt of a pole-axed ox. If he can be moved about a little and allowed to watch the effect of his own fire on the enemy, he feels merrier, and may be then worked up to the blind passion of fighting, which is, contrary to general belief, controlled by a chilly devil and shakes men like ague. If he is not moved about, and begins to feel cold at the pit of the stomach, and in that crisis is badly mauled and hears orders that were never given, he will break, and he will break badly; and of all things under the sight of the sun there is nothing more terrible than a broken British regiment. When the worst comes to the worst, and the panic is really epidemic, the men must be e'en let go, and the company commanders had better escape to the enemy and stay there for safety's sake. If they can

be made to come again, they are not pleasant men to meet, because they will not break twice.

About thirty years from this date, when we have succeeded in half-educating everything that wears trousers, our army will be a beautifully unreliable machine. It will know too much, and it will do too little. Later still, when all men are at the mental level of the officer of to-day, it will sweep the earth. Speaking roughly, you must employ either blackguards or gentlemen, or, best of all, blackguards commanded by gentlemen, to do butcher's work with efficiency and dispatch. The ideal soldier should, of course, think for himself—the *pocket-book* says so. Unfortunately, to attain this virtue, he has to pass through the phase of thinking of himself, and that is misdirected genius. A blackguard may be slow to think for himself, but he is generally anxious to kill, and a little punishment teaches him how to guard his own skin and perforate another's. A powerfully prayerful High-

land regiment, officered by rank Presbyterians, is perhaps one degree more terrible in action than a hard-bitten thousand of irresponsible Irish ruffians, led by most improper young unbelievers. But these things prove the rule — which is, that the midway men are not to be trusted alone. They have ideas about the value of life and an up-bringing that has not taught them to go on and take the chances. They are carefully unprovided with a backing of comrades who have been shot over, and until that backing is reintroduced, as a great many regimental commanders intend it shall be, they are more liable to disgrace themselves than the size of the empire or the dignity of the army allows. Their officers are as good as good can be, because their training begins early, and God has arranged that a clean-run youth of the British middle classes shall, in the matter of backbone, brains, and bowels, surpass all other youths. For this reason, a child of eighteen will stand up, doing nothing, with a tin sword in his hand and joy

in his heart until he is dropped. If he dies, he dies like a gentleman. If he lives, he writes home that he has been "potted," "sniped," "chipped" or "cut over," and sits down to besiege the government for a wound-gratuity until the next little war breaks out, when he perjures himself before a medical board, blarneys his colonel, burns incense round his adjutant, and is allowed to go to the front once more.

Which homily brings me directly to a brace of the most finished little fiends that ever banged drum or tooted fife in the band of a British regiment. They ended their sinful career by open and flagrant mutiny and were shot for it. Their names were Jakin and Lew—Piggy Lew—and they were bold, bad drummer-boys, both of them frequently birched by the drum-major of the Fore and Aft.

Jakin was a stunted child of fourteen, and Lew was about the same age. When not looked after, they smoked and drank. They swore habitually after the manner of the

barrack-room, which is cold-swearng and comes from between clenched teeth; and they fought religiously once a week. Jakin had sprung from some London gutter and may or may not have passed through Dr. Barnado's hands ere he arrived at the dignity of a drummer-boy. Lew could remember nothing except the regiment and the delight of listening to the band from his earliest years. He hid somewhere in his grimy little soul a genuine love for music, and was most mistakenly furnished with the head of a cherub; insomuch that beautiful ladies who watched the regiment in church were wont to speak of him as a "darling." They never heard his vitriolic comments on their manners and morals, as he walked back to barracks with the band and matured fresh causes of offense against Jakin.

The other drummer-boys hated both lads on account of their illogical conduct. Jakin might be pounding Lew, or Lew might be rubbing Jakin's head in the dirt; but any attempt at aggression on the part of an outsider

was met by the combined forces of Lew and Jakin, and the consequences were painful. The boys were the Ishmaels of the corps, but wealthy Ishmaels, for they sold battles in alternate weeks for the sport of the barracks when they were not pitted against other boys; and thus amassed money.

On this particular day there was dissension in the camp. They had just been convicted afresh of smoking, which is bad for little boys who use plug tobacco, and Lew's contention was that Jakin had "stunk so 'orrid bad from keepin' the pipe in his pocket," that he and he alone was responsible for the birching they were both tingling under.

"I tell you I 'id the pipe back o' barricks," said Jakin pacifically.

"You're a bloomin' liar," said Lew without heat.

"You're a bloomin' little barstard," said Jakin, strong in the knowledge that his own ancestry was unknown.

Now there is one word in the extended vo-

cabulary of barrack-room abuse that cannot pass without comment. You may call a man a thief and risk nothing. You may even call him a coward without finding more than a boot whizz past your ear, but you must not call a man a bastard unless you are prepared to prove it on his front teeth.

“ You might ha’ kep’ that till I wasn’t so sore,” said Lew, sorrowfully, dodging round Jakin’s guard.

“ I’ll make you sorer,” said Jakin, genially, and got home on Lew’s alabaster forehead. All would have gone well, and this story, as the books say, would never have been written, had not his evil fate prompted the Bazaar-Sergeant’s son, a long, employless man of five-and-twenty, to put in appearance after the first round. He was eternally in need of money, and knew that the boys had silver.

“ Fighting again,” said he. “ I’ll report you to my father, and he’ll report you to the Color-Sergeant.”

"What's that to you?" said Jakin, with an unpleasant dilation of the nostrils.

"Oh ! nothing to *me*. You'll get into trouble, and you've been up too often to afford that."

"What the hell do you know about what we've done?" asked Lew, the Seraph. "You aren't in the army, you lousy, cadging civilian!"

He closed in on the man's left flank.

"Jes' 'cause you find two gentlemen settlin' their diff'rences with their fistes, you stick in your ugly nose where you aren't wanted. Run 'ome to your 'arf-caste slut of a ma—or we'll give you what-for," said Jakin.

The man attempted reprisals by knocking the boys' heads together. The scheme would have succeeded had not Jakin punched him vehemently in the stomach, or had Lew refrained from kicking his shins. They fought together, bleeding and breathless, for half an hour, and after heavy punishment, triumph-

antly pulled down their opponent as terriers pull down a jackal.

"Now" gasped Jakin, "I'll give you what-for." He proceeded to pound the man's features while Lew stamped on the outlying portions of his anatomy. Chivalry is not a strong point in the composition of the average drummer-boy. He fights, as do his betters, to make his mark.

Ghastly was the ruin that escaped, and awful was the wrath of the Bazaar-Sergeant. Awful, too, was the scene in the orderly-room where the two reprobates appeared to answer the charge of half-murdering a "civilian." The Bazaar-Sergeant thirsted for a criminal action, and his son lied. The boys stood to attention while the black clouds of evidence accumulated.

"You little devils are more trouble than the rest of the regiment put together," said the colonel, angrily. "One might as well admonish thistledown, and I can't well put you in cells or under stoppages. You must be flogged again."

"Beg y' pardon, sir. Can't we say nothin' in our own defense, sir?" shrilled Jakin.

"Hey! What? Are you going to argue with me?" said the colonel.

"No, sir," said Lew. "But if a man come to you, sir, and said he was going to report you, sir for 'aving a bit of a turn-up with a friend, sir, an' wanted to get money out o' *you*, sir—"

The orderly-room exploded in a roar of laughter. "Well?" said the colonel.

"That was what that measly *jarnwar* there did, sir, and 'e'd a' *done* it, sir, if we 'adn't prevented 'im. We didn't 'it 'im much, sir. 'E 'adn't no manner o' right to interfere with us, sir. I don't mind bein' flogged by the Drum-Major, sir, nor yet reported by *any* corp'r'al, but I'm—but I don't think it's fair, sir, for a civilian to come an' talk over a man in the army."

A second shout of laughter shook the orderly-room, but the colonel was grave.

"What sort of characters have these boys?" he asked of the regimental sergeant-major.

"Accordin' to the Bandmaster, sir," returned that revered official—the only soul in the regiment whom the boys feared—"they do everything *but* lie, sir."

"Is it like we'd go for that man for fun, sir?" said Lew, pointing to the plaintiff.

"Oh, admonished—admonished!" said the colonel, testily, and, when the boys had gone, he read the Bazaar-Sergeant's son a lecture on the sin of unprofitable meddling and gave orders that the Bandmaster should keep the drums in better discipline.

"If either of you come to practice again with so much as a scratch on your two ugly little faces," thundered the Bandmaster, "I'll tell the Drum-Major to take the skin off your backs. Understand that, you young devils."

Then he repented of his speech for just the length of time that Lew, looking like a seraph in red-worsted embellishments, took the place of one of the trumpets—in hospital—and rendered the echo of a battle-piece. Lew certainly was a musician, and had often, in

his more exalted moments, expressed a yearning to master every instrument of the band.

"There's nothing to prevent your becoming a Bandmaster, Lew," said the Bandmaster, who had composed waltzes of his own, and worked day and night in the interests of the band.

"What did he say?" demanded Jakin, after practice.

"Said I might be a bloomin' Bandmaster, an' be asked in to 'ave a glass o' sherry-wine on mess-nights."

"Ho! Said you might be a bloomin' non-combatant, did 'e? That's just about wot 'e would say. When I've put in my boy's service—it's a bloomin' shame that doesn't count for pension—I'll take on a privit. Then, I'll be a lance in a year—knowin' what I know about the ins an' outs o' things. In three years, I'll be a bloomin' sergeant. I won't marry then, not I! I'll hold on, and learn the orf'cers' ways, an' apply for exchange into a reg'ment that doesn't know all about me. Then I'll be a bloomin' orf'cer.

Then I'll ask you to 'ave a glass o' sherry-wine, *Mister* Lew, an' you'll bloomin' well 'ave to stay in the hanty-room while the mess-sergeant brings it to your dirty 'ands."

"S'pose I'm going to be a Bandmaster? Not I, quite. I'll be a orf'cer, too. There's nothin' like taking to a thing an' stickin' to it, the schoolmaster says. The reg'ment don't go 'ome for another seven years. I'll be a lance then or near to."

Thus the boy's discussed their futures, and conducted themselves with exemplary piety for a week. That is to say, Lew started a flirtation with the Color-Sergeant's daughter, aged thirteen—"not," as he explained to Jakin, "with any intention o' matrimony, but by way o' keepin' my 'and in." And the black-haired Cris Delighan enjoyed that flirtation more than previous ones, and the other drummer-boys raged furiously together, and Jakin preached sermons on the dangers of "bein' tangled 'along o' petticoats."

But neither love nor virtue would have held Lew long in the paths of propriety, had

not the rumor gone abroad that the regiment was to be sent on active service, to take part in a war which, for the sake of brevity, we will call "The War of the Lost Tribes."

The barracks had the rumor almost before the mess-room, and of all the nine hundred men in barracks not ten had seen a shot fired in anger. The colonel had, twenty years ago, assisted at a frontier expedition; one of the majors had seen service at the Cape; a confirmed deserter in E Company had helped to clear streets in Ireland; but that was all. The regiment had been put by for many years. The overwhelming mass of its rank and file had from three to four years' service; the non-commissioned officers were under thirty years old; and men and sergeants alike had forgotten to speak of the stories, written in brief upon the colors—the new colors that had been formally blessed by an archbishop in England ere the regiment came away.

They wanted to go to the front—they were enthusiastically anxious to go—but they had

no knowledge of what war meant, and there was none to tell them. They were an educated regiment, the percentage of school certificates in their ranks was high, and most of the men could do more than read and write. They had been recruited in loyal observance of the territorial idea; but they themselves had no notion of that idea. They were made up of drafts from an overpopulated manufacturing district. The system had put flesh and muscle upon their small bones, but it could not put heart into the sons of those who for generations had done overmuch work for over-scanty pay, had sweated in drying-rooms, stooped over looms, coughed among white-lead, and shivered on lime-barges. The men had found food and rest in the army, and now they were going to fight "niggers"—people who ran away if you shook a stick at them. Wherefore they cheered lustily when the rumor ran, and the shrewd, clerkly, non-commissioned officers speculated on the chances of battle and of saving their pay. At head-quarters, men

said: "The Fore and Fit have never been under fire within the last generation. Let us, therefore, break them in easily by setting them to guard lines of communication." And this would have been done but for the fact that British regiments were wanted—badly wanted—at the front, and there were doubtful native regiments that could fill the minor duties. "Brigade 'em with two strong regiments," said head-quarters. "They may be knocked about a bit, but they'll learn their business before they come through. Nothing like a night-alarm, and a little cutting-up of stragglers to make a regiment smart in the field. Wait till they've had a half dozen sentries' throats cut."

The colonel wrote with delight that the temper of his men was excellent, that the regiment was all that could be wished, and as sound as a bell. The majors smiled with a sober joy, and the subalterns waltzed in pairs down the mess-room after dinner and nearly shot themselves at revolver-practice. But there was consternation in the hearts of

Jakin and Lew. What was to be done with the drums? Would the band go to the front? How many of the drums would accompany the regiment?

They took council together, sitting in a tree and smoking.

"It's more than a bloomin' toss-up they'll leave us be'ind at the depot with the women. You'll like that," said Jakin, sarcastically.

"'Cause o' Cris, y' mean? Wot's a woman, or a 'ole bloomin' depot o' women, 'longside o' the chanst of field-service? You know I'm as keen on goin' as you," said Lew.

"Wish I was a bloomin' bugler," said Jakin, sadly. "They'll take Tom Kidd along, that I can plaster a wall with, an' like as not they won't take us."

"Then let's go an' make Tom Kidd so bloomin' sick 'e can't bugle no more. You 'old 'is 'ands, an' I'll kick him," said Lew, wriggling on the branch.

"That ain't no good, neither. We ain't the sort o' characters to presoom on our rep'tations—they're bad. If they have the

band at the depot we don't go, and no error there. If they take the band we may get cast for medical unfitness. Are you medical fit, Piggy?" said Jakin, digging Lew in the ribs with force.

"Yus," said Lew, with an oath. "The doctor says your 'eart's weak through smokin' on an empty stummick. Throw a chest, an' I'll try yer."

Jakin threw out his chest, which Lew smote with all his might. Jakin turned very pale, gasped, crowed, screwed up his eyes, and said, "That's all right."

"You'll do" said Lew. "I've 'eard 'o men dyin' when you 'it 'em fair on the breast-bone."

"Don't bring us no nearer goin', though," said Jakin. "Do you know where we're ordered?"

"Gawd knows, an' 'e won't split on a pal. Somewheres up to the front to kill Paythans — hairy big beggars that turn you inside out if they get 'old of you. They say their women are good-looking, too."

"Any loot?" asked the abandoned Jakin.

"Not a bloomin' anna, they say, unless they dig up the ground an' see what the niggers 'ave 'id. They're a poor lot." Jakin stood upright on the branch and gazed across the plain.

"Lew," said he, "there's the colonel coming. Colonel's a good old beggar. Let's go an' talk to 'im."

Lew nearly fell out of the tree at the audacity of the suggestion. Like Jakin, he feared not God, neither regarded he man, but there are limits even to the audacity of a drummer-boy, and to speak to a colonel was—

But Jakin had slid down the trunk and doubled in the direction of the colonel. That officer was walking wrapped in thought and visions of a C. B.—yes, even a K. C. B., for had he not at command one of the best regiments of the line—the Fore and Fit? And he was aware of two small boys charging down upon him. Once before, it had been solemnly reported to him that "the

drums were in a state of mutiny;" Jakin and Lew being the ringleaders. This looked like an organized conspiracy.

The boys halted at twenty yards, walked to the regulation four paces, and saluted together, each as well set-up as a ramrod and little taller.

The colonel was in a genial mood; the boys appeared very forlorn and unprotected on the desolate plain, and one of them was handsome.

"Well!" said the colonel, recognizing them. "Are you going to pull me down in the open? I'm sure I never interfere with you, even though"—he sniffed suspiciously—"you have been smoking."

It was time to strike while the iron was hot. Their hearts beat tumultuously.

"Beg y' pardon, sir," began Jakin. "The reg'ment's ordered on active service, sir?"

"So I believe," said the colonel, courteously.

"Is the band goin', sir?" said both to-

gether. Then, without pause, "We're going sir, ain't we?"

"You!" said the colonel, stepping back the more fully to take in the two small figures. "You! You'd die in the first march."

"No, we wouldn't, sir. We can march with the reg'ment anywheres—p'rade an' anywhere else," said Jakin.

"If Tom Kidd goes, 'e'll shut up like a clasp-knife," said Lew. "Tom 'as very-close veins in both 'is legs, sir."

"Very how much?"

"Very-close veins, sir. That's why they swells after long p'rade, sir. If 'e can go, we can go, sir."

Again the colonel looked at them long and intently.

"Yes, the band is going," he said as gravely as though he had been addressing a brother officer. "Have you any parents, either of you two?"

"No, sir," rejoicingly from Lew and Jakin. "We're both orphans, sir. There's no one to be considered of on our account, sir."

"You poor little sprats, and you want to go up to the front with the regiment, do you? Why?"

"I've wore the queen's uniform for two years," said Jakin. "It's very 'ard, sir, that a man don't get no recompense for doin' 'is dooty, sir."

"An'an' if I don't go, sir," interrupted Lew, "the Bandmaster 'e says 'e'll catch an' make a bloo—a blessed musician o' me, sir. Before I've seen any service, sir."

The colonel made no answer for a long time. Then he said, quietly: "If you're passed by the doctor, I dare say you can go. I shouldn't smoke if I were you."

The boys saluted and disappeared. The colonel walked home and told the story to his wife, who nearly cried over it. The colonel was well pleased. If that was the temper of the children, what would not the men do?

Jakin and Lew entered the boys' barrack-room with great stateliness, and refused to

hold any conversation with their comrades for at least ten minutes. Then, bursting with pride, Jakin drawled: "I've been intervooin' the colonel. Good old beggar is the colonel. Says I to 'im, 'Colonel,' says I, 'let me go to the front, along o' the reg'ment.' 'To the front you shall go,' says 'e, 'an' I only wish there was more like you among the dirty little devils that bang the bloomin' drums.' Kidd, if you throw your 'conterments at me for tellin' you the truth to your own advantage, your legs 'll swell."

None the less there was a battle-royal in the barrack-room, for the boys were consumed with envy and hate, and neither Jakin nor Lew behaved in conciliatory wise.

"I'm goin' out to say adoo to my girl," said Lew, to cap the climax. "Don't none o' you touch my kit, because it's wanted for active service, me bein' specially invited to go by the colonel."

He strolled forth and whistled in the clump of trees at the back of the married quarters till Cris came to him, and, the pre-

liminary kisses being given and taken, Lew began to explain the situation.

"I'm goin' to the front with the reg'ment," he said, valiantly.

"Piggy, you're a little liar," said Cris, but her heart misgave her, for Lew was not in the habit of lying.

"Liar yourself, Cris," said Lew, slipping an arm around her. "I'm goin'. When the reg'ment marches out you'll see me with 'em, all galliant and gay. Give us another kiss, Cris, on the strength of it."

"If you'd only stayed at the depot—where you *ought* to ha' bin—you could get as many of 'em as—as you damn please," whimpered Cris, putting up her mouth.

"It's ard, Cris. I grant you, it's 'ard. But what's a man to do? If I'd a-stayed at the depot, you wouldn't think anything of me."

"Like as not, but I'd 'ave you with me, Piggy. An' all the thinkin' in the world isn't like kissin'!"

"An' all the kissin' in the world isn't like

'avin a medal to wear on the front o' your coat."

"*You* won't get no medal."

"Oh, yus, I shall, though. Me an' Jakin are the only acting-drummers that'll be took along. All the rest is full men, an' we'll get our medals with them."

"They might ha' taken anybody but you, Piggy. You'll get killed — you're so venturesome. Stay with me, Piggy, darlin', down at the depot, an' I'll love you true forever."

"Ain't you goin' to do that *now*, Cris? You said you was."

"O' course I am, but th' other's more comfortable. Wait till you've growed a bit, Piggy. You aren't no taller than me now."

"I've been in the army for two years an' I'm not goin' to get out of a chanst o' seein' service an' don't you try to make me do so. I'll come back, Cris, an' when I take on as a man I'll marry you—marry you when I'm a lance."

“Promise, Piggy?”

Lew reflected on the future as arranged by Jakin a short time previously, but Cris's mouth was very near to his own.

“I promise, s'elp me Gawd!” said he.

Cris slid an arm round his neck.

“I won't 'old you back no more, Piggy. Go away an' get your medal, an' I'll make you a new button-bag as nice as I know how,” she whispered.

“Put some o' your 'air into it, Cris, an' I'll keep it in my pocket so long's I'm alive.”

Then Cris wept anew, and the interview ended. Public feeling among the drummer-boys rose to fever pitch, and the lives of Jakin and Lew became unenviable. Not only had they been permitted to enlist two years before the regulation boy's age—fourteen—but, by virtue, it seemed, of their extreme youth, they were allowed to go to the front—which thing had not happened to acting-drummers within the knowledge of boy. The band which was to accompany the regi-

ment had been cut down to the regulation twenty men, the surplus returning to the ranks. Jakin and Lew were attached to the band as supernumeraries, though they would much have preferred being company buglers.

"Don't matter much," said Jakin, after the medical inspection. "Be thankful that we're 'lowed to go at all. The doctor 'e said that if we could stand what we took from the Bazaar-Sergeant's son, we'd stand pretty nigh everything."

"Which we will," said Lew, looking tenderly at the ragged and ill-made housewife that Cris had given him, with a lock of her hair worked into a sprawling "L" upon the cover.

"It was the best I could," she sobbed. "I wouldn't let mother nor the sergeant's tailor 'elp me. Keep it always, Piggy, an' remember I love you true."

They marched to the railway station, nine hundred and sixty strong, and every soul in cantonments turned out to see them go. The

drummers gnashed their teeth at Jakin and Lew marching with the band, the married women wept upon the platform, and the regiment cheered its noble self black in the face.

"A nice level lot," said the colonel to the second in command as they watched the first four companies entraining.

"Fit to do anything," said the second in command, enthusiastically. "But it seems to me they're a thought too young and tender for the work in hand. It's bitter cold up at the front now."

"They're sound enough," said the colonel. "We must take our chance of sick casualties."

So they went northward, ever northward, past droves and droves of camels, armies of camp followers, and legions of laden mules, the throng thickening day by day, till with a shriek the train pulled up at a hopelessly congested junction where six lines of temporary track accommodated six forty-wagon trains; where whistles blew, Babus sweated

and commissariat officers swore from dawn till far into the night amid the wind-driven chaff of the fodder-bales and the lowing of a thousand steers.

“Hurry up—you’re badly wanted at the front,” was the message that greeted the Fore and Aft, and the occupants of the Red Cross carriages told the same tale.

“ ‘Tisn’t so much the bloomin’ fightin’,” gasped a headbound trooper of hussars to a knot of admiring Fore and Aft’s. “ ‘Tisn’t so much the bloomin’ fightin’, though there’s enought o’ that. It’s the bloomin’ food an’ the bloomin’ climate. Frost all night ’cept when it hails, an’ bilin’ sun all day, an’ the water stinks fit to knock you down. I got my ’ead chipped like a egg; I’ve got pneumonia, too, an’ my guts is all out o’ order. ‘Tain’t no bloomin’ picnic in those parts, I can tell you.”

“Wot are the niggers like?” demanded a private.

“There’s some prisoners in that train yonder. Go an’ look at ’em. They’re the aris-

tocracy o' the country. The common folk are a dashed sight uglier. If you want to know what they fight with, reach under my seat an' pull out the long knife that's there."

They dragged out and beheld for the first time the grim, bone-handled, triangular Afghan knife. It was almost as long as Lew.

"That's the think to j'int ye," said the trooper, feebly. "It can take off a man's arm at the shoulder as easy as slicing butter. I halved the beggar that used that 'un, but there's more of his likes up above. They don't understand thrustin', but they're devils to slice."

The men strolled across the tracks to inspect the Afghan prisoners. They were unlike any "niggers" that the Fore and Aft had ever met—these huge, black-haired, scowling sons of the Beni-Israel. As the men stared, the Afghans spat freely and muttered one to another with lowered eyes.

"My eyes! Wot awful swine!" said Jakin, who was in the rear of the procession. "Say, old man, how you got *puckrowed*, eh?"

Kiswasti you wasn't hanged for your ugly face, hey?"

The tallest of the company turned, his leg-irons clanking at the movement, and stared at the boy. "See!" he cried to his fellows in Pushto, "they send children against us. What a people, and what fools!"

"*Hya!*" said Jakin, nodding his head, cheerily. "You go down-country. *Khana* get, *peenikapanee* get—live like a bloomin' rajah *ke marfik*. That's a better *bandobust* than baynit get it in your inwards. Good-bye, old man. Take care o' your beautiful figure'-ed, an' try to look *kushy*."

The men laughed and fell in for their first march, when they began to realize that a soldier's life was not all beer and skittles. They were much impressed with the size and bestial ferocity of the niggers, whom they had now learned to call "Paythans," and more with the exceeding discomfort of their own surroundings. Twenty old soldiers in the corps would have taught them how to make themselves moderately snug at night, but

they had no old soldiers, and, as the troops on the line of march said, "they lived like pigs." They learned the heart-breaking cussedness of camp-kitchens and camels and the depravity of an E. P. tent and a wither-wrung mule. They studied animalcule in water, and developed a few cases of dysentery in their study.

At the end of their third march they were disagreeably surprised by the arrival in their camp of a hammered iron slug which, fired from a steady-rest at seven hundred yards, flicked out the brains of a private seated by the fire. This robbed them of their peace for a night, and was the beginning of a long-range fire carefully calculated to that end. In the daytime they saw nothing except an occasional puff of smoke from a crag above the line of march. At night there were distant spurts of flame and occasional casualties, which set the whole camp blazing into the gloom, and, occasionally, into opposite tents. Then they swore vehemently and vowed that this was magnificent but not war.

Indeed it was not. The regiment could not halt for reprisals against the sharp-shooters of the country-side. Its duty was to go forward and make connection with the Seoteh and Gurkha troops with which it was brigaded. The Afghans knew this, and knew, too, after their first tentative shots, that they were dealing with a raw regiment. Thereafter they devoted themselves to the task of keeping the Fore and Aft on the strain. Not for anything would they have taken equal liberties with a seasoned corps—with the wicked little Gurkhas whose delight it was to lie out in the open on a dark night and stalk their stalkers—with the terrible, big men dressed in women's clothes, who could be heard praying to their God in the night-watches, and whose peace of mind no amount of "snipping" could shake—or with those vile Sikhs, who marched so ostentatiously unprepared, and who dealt out such grim reward to those who tried to profit by that unpreparedness. This white regiment was different—quite different. It slept like

a hog, and, like a hog, charged in every direction when it was roused. Its sentries walked with a footfall that could be heard for a quarter of a mile; would fire at anything that moved—even a driven donkey—and when they had once fired, could be scientifically “rushed” and laid out a horror and an offense against the morning sun. Then there were camp-followers who straggled and could be cut up without fear. Their shrieks would disturb the white boys, and the loss of their services would inconvenience them sorely.

Thus, at every march, the hidden enemy became bolder and the regiment writhed and twisted under attacks it could not avenge. The crowning triumph was a sudden night-rush ending in the cutting of many tent-ropes, the collapse of the sudden canvas and a glorious knifing of the men who struggled and kicked below. It was a great deed, neatly carried out, and it shook the already shaken nerves of the Fore and Aft. All the courage that they had been required to exer-

cise up to this point was the “two o’clock in the morning courage;” and they, so far, had only succeeded in shooting their comrades and losing their sleep.

Sullen, discontented, cold, savage, sick, with their uniforms dulled and unclean the Fore and Aft joined their brigade.

“I hear you had a tough time of it coming up” said the brigadier. But when he saw the hospital-sheets his face fell.

“This is bad,” said he to himself. “They’re as rotten as sheep.” And aloud to the colonel, “I’m afraid we can’t spare you just yet. We want all we have, else I should have given you ten days to recruit in.”

The colonel winced. “On my honor, sir,” he returned, “there is not the least necessity to think of sparing us. My men have been rather mauled and upset without a fair return. They only want to go in somewhere where they can see what’s before them.”

“Can’t say I think much of the Fore and Aft,” said the brigadier in confidence to his brigade-major. “They’ve lost all their sol-

diering, and by the trim of them, might have marched through the country from the other side. A more fagged-out set of men I never put eyes on."

"Oh, they'll improve as the work goes on. The parade gloss has been rubbed off a little, but they'll put on field polish before long," said the brigade-major. "They've been mauled, and they don't quite understand it."

They did not. All the hitting was on one side, and it was cruelly hard hitting with accessories that made them sick. There was also the real sickness that laid hold of a strong man and dragged him howling to the grave. Worst of all, their officers knew just as little of the country as the men themselves, and looked as if they did. The Fore and Aft were in a thoroughly unsatisfactory condition, but they believed that all would be well if they once got a fair go-in at the enemy. Pot-shots up and down the valleys were unsatisfactory, and the bayonet never seemed to get a chance. Perhaps it was as well, for a long-limbed Afghan with a knife

had a reach of eight feet, and could carry away enough lead to disable three Englishmen. The Fore and Aft would like some rifle practice at the enemy—all seven hundred rifles blazing together. That wish showed the mood of the men.

The Gurkhas walked into their camp, and in broken, barrack-room English strove to fraternize with them; offered them pipes of tobacco, and stood them treat at the canteen. But the Fore and Aft, not knowing much of the nature of the Gurkhas, treated them as they would treat any other “niggers,” and the little men in green trotted back to their firm friends, the Highlanders, and with many grins confided to them: “That damn white regiment no damn use. Sulky—ugh! Dirty—ugh! Hya, any tot for Johnny?” Whereat the Highlanders smote the Gurkhas as to the head, and told them not to vilify a British regiment, and the Gurkhas grinned cavernously, for the Highlanders were their elder brothers and entitled to the privileges of kinship. The common soldier

who touches a Gurkha is more than likely to have his head sliced open.

Three days later, the brigadier arranged a battle according to the rules of war and the peculiarity of the Afghan temperament. The enemy were massing in inconvenient strength among the hills, and the moving of many green standards warned him that the tribes were "up" in aid of the Afghan regular troops. A squadron and a half of Bengal lancers represented the available cavalry, and two screw-guns borrowed from a column thirty miles away, the artillery at the general's disposal.

"If they stand, as I've a very strong notion that they will, I fancy we shall see an infantry fight that will be worth watching," said the brigadier. "We'll do it in style. Each regiment shall be played into action by its band, and we'll hold the cavalry in reserve."

"For all the reserve?" somebody asked.

"For all the reserve; because we're going to crumple them up," said the brigadier, who

was an extraordinary brigadier, and did not believe in the value of a reserve when dealing with Asiatics. And indeed, when you come to think of it, had the British army consistently waited for reserves in all its little affairs, the boundaries of our empire would have stopped at Brighton beach.

That battle was to be a glorious battle.

The three regiments debouching from three separate gorges, after duly crowning the heights above, were to converge from the center, left, and right upon what we will call the Afghan army, then stationed toward the lower extremity of a flat-bottomed valley. Thus it will be seen that three sides of the valley practically belonged to the English, while the fourth was strictly Afghan property. In the event of defeat, the Afghans had the rocky hills to fly to, where the fire from the guerilla tribes in aid would cover their retreat. In the event of victory, these same tribes would rush down and lend their weight to the rout of the British.

The screw-guns were to shell the head of

each Afghan rush that was made in close formation, and the cavalry, held in reserve in the right valley, were to gently stimulate the break-up which would follow on the combined attack. The brigadier, sitting upon a rock overlooking the valley, would watch the battle unrolled at his feet. The Fore and Aft would debouch from the central gorge, the Gurkhas from the left, and the Highlanders from the right, for the reason that the left flank of the enemy seemed as though it required the most hammering. It was not every day that an Afghan force would take ground in the open, and the brigadier was resolved to make the most of it.

"If we only had a few more men," he said plaintively, "we could surround the creatures and crumble 'em up thoroughly. As it is, I'm afraid we can only cut them up as they run. It's a great pity."

The Fore and Aft had enjoyed unbroken peace for five days, and were beginning, in spite of dysentery, to recover their nerve.

But they were not happy, for they did not know the work in hand, and had they known, would not have known how to do it. Throughout those five days in which old soldiers might have taught them the craft of the game, they discussed together their mis-adventures in the past—how such an one was alive at dawn and dead ere the dusk, and with what shrieks and struggles such another had given up his soul under the Afghan knife. Death was a new and horrible thing to the sons of mechanics who were used to die decently of zymotic disease; and their careful conservation in barracks had done nothing to make them look upon it with less dread.

Very early in the dawn the bugles began to blow, and the Fore and Aft filled with a misguided enthusiasm, turned out without waiting for a cup of coffee and a biscuit ; and were rewarded by being kept under arms in the cold while the other regiments leisurely prepared for the fray. All the world knows that it is ill taking the breeks

off a Highlander. It is much iller to try to make him stir unless he is convinced of the necessity for haste.

The Fore and Aft waited, leaning upon their rifles and listening to the protests of their empty stomachs. The colonel did his best to remedy the default of lining as soon as it was borne in upon him that the affair would not begin at once, and so well did he succeed that the coffee was just ready when —the men moved off, their band leading. Even then there had been a mistake in time, and the Fore and Aft came out into the valley ten minutes before the proper hour. Their band wheeled to the right after reaching the open, and retired behind a little rocky knoll, still playing while the regiment went past.

It was not a pleasant sight that opened on the unobstructed view, for the lower end of the valley appeared to be filled by an army in position—real and actual regiments attired in red coats, and—of this there was no doubt—firing Martini-Henri bullets which

cut up the ground a hundred yards in front of the leading company. Over that pock-marked ground the regiment had to pass, and it opened the ball with a general and profound courtesy to the piping pickets; ducking in perfect time, as though it had been brazed on a rod. Being half capable of thinking for itself, it fired a volley by the simple process of pitching its rifle into its shoulder and pulling the trigger. The bullets may have accounted for some of the watchers on the hill-side, but they certainly did not affect the mass of enemy in front, while the noise of the rifles drowned any orders that might have been given.

“Good God!” said the brigadier, sitting on the rock high above all. “That regiment has spoiled the whole show. Hurry up the others, and let the screw-guns get off.”

But the screw-guns, in working round the heights, had stumbled upon a wasp’s nest of a small mud fort which they incontinently shelled at eight hundred yards, to the huge

discomfort of the occupants, who were unaccustomed to weapons of such devilish precision.

The Fore and Aft continued to go forward, but with shortened stride. Where were the other regiments, and why did these niggers use Martinis? They took open order instinctively, lying down and firing at random, rushing a few paces forward and lying down again, according to the regulations. Once in this formation each man felt himself desperately alone, and edged in toward his fellow for comfort's sake.

Then the crack of his neighbor's rifle at his ear led him to fire as rapidly as he could —again for the sake of the comfort of the noise. The reward was not long delayed. Five volleys plunged the files in banked smoke impenetrable to the eye, and the bullets began to take ground twenty or thirty yards in front of the firers, as the weight of the bayonet dragged down, and the right arms wearied with holding the kick of the leaping Martini. The company commanders

peered helplessly through the smoke, the more nervous mechanically trying to fan it away with their helmets.

"High and to the left!" bawled a captain till he was hoarse. "No good! Cease firing, and let it drift away a bit."

Three or four times the bugles shrieked the order, and when it was obeyed the Fore and Aft looked that their foe should be lying before them in mown swaths of men. A light wind drove the smoke to leeward, and showed the enemy still in position and apparently unaffected. A quarter of a ton of lead had been buried a furlong in front of them, as the ragged earth attested.

That was not demoralizing. They were waiting for the mad riot to die down, and were firing quietly into the heart of the smoke. A private of the Fore and Aft spun up his company shrieking with agony, another was kicking the earth and gasping, and a third, ripped through the lower intestines by a jagged bullet, was calling aloud on his comrades to put him out of his pain.

These were the casualties, and they were not soothing to hear or see. The smoke cleared to a dull haze.

Then the foe began to shout with a great shouting and a mass—a black mass—detached itself from the main body, and rolled over the ground at horrid speed. It was composed of, perhaps, three hundred men, who would shout and fire and slash if the rush of their fifty comrades, who were determined to die, carried home. The fifty were Ghazis, half-maddened with drugs and wholly mad with religious fanaticism. When they rushed, the British fire ceased, and in the lull the order was given to close ranks and meet them with the bayonet.

Any one who knew the business could have told the Fore and Aft that the only way of dealing with a Ghazi rush is by volleys at long ranges; because a man who means to die, who desires to die, who will gain heaven by dying, must, in nine cases out of ten, kill a man who has a lingering prejudice in favor of life if he can close with

the latter. Where they should have closed and gone forward, the Fore and Aft opened out and skirmished, and where they should have opened out and fired, they closed and waited.

A man dragged from his blankets half awake and unfed is never in a pleasant frame of mind. Nor does his happiness increase when he watches the whites of the eyes of three hundred six-foot fiends upon whose beards the foam is lying, upon whose tongues is a roar of wrath, and in whose hands are three-foot knives.

The Fore and Aft heard the Gurkha bugles bringing that regiment forward at the double, while the neighing of the Highland pipes came from the left. They strove to stay where they were, though the bayonets wavered down the line like the oars of a ragged boat. Then they felt body to body the amazing physical strength of their foes; a shriek of pain ended the rush, and the knives fell amid scenes not to be told. The men clubbed together and smote blindly—as

often as not at their own fellows. Their front crumpled like paper, and the fifty Ghazis passed on; their backers, now drunk with success, fighting as madly as they.

Then the rear ranks were bidden to close up, and the subalterns dashed into the stew—alone. For the rear rank had heard the clamor in front, the yells and the howls of pain, and had seen the dark stale blood that makes afraid. They were not going to stay. It was the rushing of the camps over again. Let their officers go to hell, if they chose; they would get away from the knives.

“Come on!” shrieked the subalterns, and their men, cursing them, drew back, each closing into his neighbor and wheeling round.

Charteris and Devlin, subalterns of the last company, faced their death alone in the belief that their men would follow.

“You’ve killed me, you cowards,” sobbed Devlin, and dropped, cut from the shoulder-strap to the centre of the chest, and a fresh detachment of his men retreating, always

retreating, trampled him under foot as they made for the pass whence they had emerged.

I kissed her in the kitchen and I kissed her in the hall.

Child'un, child'un follow me !

Oh, Golly, said the cook, is he gwine to kiss us all ?

Halla—Halla—Halla—Hallujah !

The Gurkhas were pouring through the left gorge and over the heights at the double to the invitation of their regimental quick-step. The black rocks were crowned with dark-green spiders as the bugles gave tongue jubilantly:

In the morning ! In the morning by the bright light !

When Gabriel blows his trumpet in the morning !

The Gurkha rear companies tripped and blundered over loose stones. The front files halted for a moment to take stock of the valley and to settle stray boot-laces. Then a happy little sigh of contentment soughed down the ranks, and it was as though the land smiled, for behold there below was the enemy, and it was to meet them that the Gurkhas had doubled so hastily. There was much enemy. There would be amusement.

The little men hitched their *kukris* well to hand, and gaped expectantly at their officers as terriers grin ere the stone is cast for them to fetch. The Gurkhas' ground sloped downward to the valley, and they enjoyed a fair view of the proceedings. They sat upon the bowlders to watch, for their officers were not going to waste their wind in assisting to repulse a Ghazi rush more than half a mile away. Let the white men look to their own front.

"Hi! yi!" said the Subadar major, who was sweating profusely. "Dam fools yonder stand close-order! This is no time for close-order, it's the time for volleys. Ugh!" Horrified, amused, and indignant, the Gurkhas beheld the retirement—let us be gentle—of the Fore and Aft with a running chorus of oaths and commentaries.

"They run! The white men run! Colonel Sahib, may *we* also do a little running?" murmured Runbir Thappa, the senior Jemadar.

But the colonel would have none of it.

"Let the beggars be cut up a little," said he, wrathfully. "Serves 'em right. They'll be prodded into facing round in a minute." He looked through his field-glasses, and caught the glint of an officer's sword.

"Beating 'em with the flat—damned conscripts! How the Ghazis are walking into them!" said he.

The Fore and Aft, heading back, bore with them their officers. The narrowness of the pass forced the mob into solid formation, and the rear rank delivered some sort of a wavering volley. The Ghazis drew off, for they did not know what reserves the gorge might hide. Moreover, it was never wise to chase white men too far. They returned as wolves return to cover, satisfied with the slaughter that they had done, and only stopping to slash at the wounded on the ground. A quarter of a mile had the Fore and Aft retreated, and now, jammed in the pass, was quivering with pain, shaken and demoralized with fear, while the officers, maddened be-

yond control, smote the men with the hilts and the flats of their swords.

"Get back! Get back, you cowards—you women! Right about face—column of companies, form—you hounds!" shouted the colonel, and the subalterns swore aloud. But the regiment wanted to go—to go anywhere out of the range of those merciless knives. It swayed to and fro irresolutely with shouts and outcries, while from the right the Gurkhas dropped volley after volley of cripple-stopper Snider bullets at long range into the mob of the Ghazis returning to their own troops.

The Fore and Aft band, though protected from direct fire by the rocky knoll under which it had sat down, fled at the first rush. Jakin and Lew would have fled also, but their short legs left them fifty yards in the rear, and by the time the band had mixed with the regiment, they were painfully aware that they would have to close in alone and unsupported.

"Get back to that rock," gasped Jakin.
"They won't see us there."

And they returned to the scattered instruments of the band; their hearts nearly bursting their ribs.

"Here's a nice show for *us*," said Jakin, throwing himself full length on the ground. "A bloomin' fine show for British infantry! Oh, the devils! They've gone and left us here alone! Wot'll we do?"

Lew took possession of a cast-off water-bottle, which naturally was full of canteen rum, and drank till he coughed again.

"Drink," said he shortly. "They'll come back in a minute or two—you see."

Jakin drank, but there was no sign of the regiment's return. They could hear a dull clamor from the head of the valley of retreat, and saw the Ghazis slink back, quickening their pace as the Gurkhas fired at them.

"We're all that's left of the band, an' we'll be cut up as sure as death," said Jakin.

"I'll die game, then," said Lew thickly,

fumbling with his tiny drummer's sword. The drink was working on his brain as it was on Jakin's.

"Old on! I know something better than fightin'," said Jakin, stung by the splendor of a sudden thought, due chiefly to rum. "Tip our bloomin' cowards yonder the word to come back. The Paythan beggars are well away. Come on, Lew! We won't get hurt. Take the fife an' give me the drum. The Old Step for all your bloomin' guts are worth! There's a few of our men coming back now. Stand up, ye drunken little defaulter. By your right—quick march!"

He slipped the drum-sling over his shoulders, thrust the fife into Lew's hand, and the two boys marched out of the cover of the rock into the open, making a hideous hash of the first bars of the "British Grenadiers."

As Lew had said, a few of the Fore and Aft were coming back sullenly and shame-facedly under the stimulus of blows and abuse; their red coats shone at the head of the valley, and behind them were wavering

bayonets. But between this shattered line and the enemy, who with Afghan suspicion feared that the hasty retreat meant an ambush, and had not moved therefore, lay half a mile of level ground dotted only by the wounded.

The tune settled into full swing, and the boys kept shoulder to shoulder, Jakin banging the drum as one possessed. The one fife made a thin and pitiful squeaking, but the tune carried far, even to the Gurkhas.

"Come on, you dogs!" muttered Jakin to himself. "Are we to play forever?" Lew was staring straight in front of him and marching more stiffly than he had ever done on parade.

And in bitter mockery of the distant mob, the old tune of the Old Line shrilled and rattled:

Some talk of Alexander,
And some of Hercules;
Of Hector and Lysander,
And such great names as these.

There was a far-off clapping of hands from the Gurkhas, and a roar from the Highland-

ers in the distance, but never a shot was fired by British or Afghan. The two little red dots moved forward in the open parallel to the enemy's front.

But of all the world's great heroes
There's none that can compare,
With a tow-row-row-row-row,
To the British Grenadier !

The men of the Fore and Aft were gathering thick at the entrance into the plain. The brigadier on the heights far above was speechless with rage. Still no movement from the enemy. The day stayed to watch the children.

Jakin halted and beat the long roll of the assembly, while the fife squealed despairingly.

“ Right about face! Hold up, Lew, you're drunk,” said Jakin. They wheeled and marched back:

Those heroes of antiquity
Ne'er saw a cannon-ball,
Nor knew the force o' powder,

“ Here they come!” said Jakin. “ Go on, Lew:”

To scare their foes wi' hal !

The Fore and Aft were pouring out of the valley. What officers had said to men in that time of shame and humiliation will never be known, for neither officers nor men speak of it now.

“They are coming anew!” shouted a priest among the Afghans. “Do not kill the boys! Take them alive, and they shall be of our faith.”

But the first volley had been fired, and Lew dropped on his face. Jakin stood for a minute, spun round, and collapsed as the Fore and Aft came forward, the maledictions of their officers in their ears, and in their hearts the shame of open shame.

Half the men had seen the drummers die, and they made no sign. They did not even shout. They doubled out straight across the plain in open order, and they did not fire.

“This,” said the Colonel of the Gurkhas, softly, “is the real attack, as it ought to have been delivered. Come on, my children.”

“Ulu-lu-lu-lu!” squealed the Gurkhas,

and came down with a joyful clicking of *kukris*—those vicious Gurkha knives.

On the right there was no rush. The Highlanders cannily commanding their souls to God (for it matters as much to a dead man whether he has been shot in a border scuffle or at Waterloo), opened out and fired according to their custom; that is to say, without heat and without intervals, while the screw-guns, having disposed of the impertinent mud fort afore-mentioned, dropped shell after shell into the clusters round the flickering green standards on the heights.

“Chargin’ is an unfortunate necessity,” murmured the color-sergeant of the right company of the Highlanders.

“It makes the men sweer so, but I am thinkin’ that it will come to a charrge if these black devils stand much longer. Stewarrt, man, you’re firing into the eye of the sun, and he’ll not take any harm for government ammuneetion. A foot lower and a great deal slower! What are the English doing?

They're very quiet there in the centre. Running again?"

The English were not running. They were hacking and hewing and stabbing, for though one white man is seldom physically a match for an Afghan in a sheep-skin or wadded coat, yet, through the pressure of the many white men behind, and a certain thirst for revenge in his heart, he becomes capable of doing much with both ends of his rifle. The Fore and Aft held their fire till one bullet could drive through five or six men, and the front of the Afghan force gave on the volley. They then selected their men and slew them with deep gasps and short hacking coughs, and groanings of leather belts against strained bodies, and realized for the first time that an Afghan attacked is far less formidable than an Afghan attacking ; which fact old soldiers might have told them.

But they had no old soldiers in their ranks.

The Gurkhas' stall at the bazaar was the noisiest, for the men were engaged—to a

nasty noise as of beef being cut on the block —with the *kukri*, which they preferred to the bayonet; well knowing how the Afghan hates the half-moon blade.

As the Afghans wavered, the green standards on the mountain moved down to assist them in a last rally; which was unwise. The lancers chafing in the right gorge had thrice dispatched their only subaltern as galloper to report on the progress of affairs. On the third occasion he returned, with a bullet-graze on his knee, swearing strange oaths in Hindoostanee, and saying that all things were ready. So that squadron swung round the right of the Highlanders with a wicked whistling of wind in the pennons of its lances, and fell upon the remnant just when, according to the rules of war, it should have waited for the foe to show more signs of wavering.

But it was a dainty charge, deftly delivered, and it ended by the cavalry finding itself at the head of the pass by which the Afghans intended to retreat; and down the

track that the lances had made streamed two companies of the Highlanders, which was never intended by the brigadier. The new development was successful. It detached the enemy from his base as a sponge is torn from a rock, and left him ringed about with fire in that pitiless plain. And as a sponge is chased round the bath-tub by the hand of the bather, so were the Afghans chased till they broke into little detachments much more difficult to dispose of than large masses.

"See!" quoth the brigadier. "Everything has come as I arranged. We've cut their base, and now we'll bucket 'em to pieces."

A direct hammering was all that the brigadier had dared to hope for, considering the size of the force at his disposal; but men who stand or fall by the errors of their opponents may be forgiven for turning Chance into Design. The bucketing went forward merrily. The Afghan forces were upon the run—the run of wearied wolves who snarl and bite over their shoulders. The red

lances dipped by twos and threes, and, with a shriek, up rose the lance-butt, like a spar on a stormy sea, as the trooper cantering forward cleared his point. The lancers kept between their prey and the steep hills, for all who could were trying to escape from the valley of death. The Highlanders gave the fugitives two hundred yards' law, and then brought them down, gasping and choking, ere they could reach the protection of the bowlders above. The Gurkhas followed suit; but the Fore and Aft were killing on their own account, for they had penned a mass of men between their bayonets and a wall of rock, and the flash of the rifles was lighting the wadded coats.

“We can not hold them, Captain Sahib!” panted a ressaidar of lancers. “Let us try the carbine. The lance is good, but it wastes time.”

They tried the carbine and still the enemy melted away—fled up the hills by hundreds when there were only twenty bullets to stop them. On the heights the screw-guns ceased

firing—they had run out of ammunition—and the brigadier groaned, for the musketry fire could not sufficiently smash the retreat. Long before the last volleys were fired the litters were out in force looking for the wounded. The battle was over, and, but for want of fresh troops, the Afghans would have been wiped off the earth. As it was they counted their dead by hundreds, and nowhere were the dead thicker than in the track of the Fore and Aft.

But the regiment did not cheer with the Highlanders, nor did they dance uncouth dances with the Gurkhas among the dead. They looked under their brows at the colonel as they leaned upon their rifles and panted.

“Get back to camp, you! Haven’t you disgraced yourself enough for one day? Go and look to the wounded. It’s all you’re fit for,” said the colonel. Yet for the past hour the Fore and Aft had been doing all that mortal commander could expect. They had lost heavily because they did not know how to set about their business with proper skill,

but they had borne themselves gallantly, and this was their reward.

A young and sprightly color-sergeant, who had begun to imagine himself a hero, offered his water-bottle to a Highlander, whose tongue was black with thirst. "I drink with no cowards," answered the youngster, huskily, and turning to a Gurkha, said, "Hya, Johnny! Drink water got it?" The Gurkha grinned and passed his bottle. The Fore and Aft said no word.

They went back to camp when the field of strife had been a little mopped up and made presentable and the brigadier, who saw himself a knight in three months, was the only soul who was complimentary to them. The colonel was heart-broken and the officers were savage and sullen.

"Well," said the brigadier, "they are young troops, of course, and it was not unnatural that they should retire in disorder for a bit."

"Oh, my only Aunt Maria!" murmured a

junior staff officer. "Retire in disorder! It was a bully run!"

"But they came again as we all know," cooed the brigadier, the colonel's ashy-white face before him, "and they behaved as well as could possibly be expected. Behaved beautifully indeed. I was watching them. It's not a matter to take to heart, colonel. As some German general said of his men, they wanted to be shot over a little, that was all." To himself he said:—"Now they're blooded I can give 'em responsible work. It's as well that they got what they did. Teach 'em more than half-a-dozen rifle flirtations, that will—later—run alone and bite. Poor old colonel, though."

All that afternoon the heliograph winked and flickered on the hills, striving to tell the good news to a mountain forty miles away. And in the evening there arrived—dusty, sweating, and sore—a misguided correspondent who had gone out to assist at a trumpery village-burning and who had read off the

message from afar, cursing his luck the while.

"Let's have the details somehow—as full as ever you can, please. It's the first time I've ever been left this campaign," said the correspondent to the brigadier; and the brigadier, nothing loath, told him how an army of communication had been crumpled up, destroyed, and all but annihilated by the craft, strategy, wisdom, and foresight of the brigadier.

But some say, and among these be the Gurkhas who watched on the hill-side, that that battle was won by Jakin and Lew, whose little bodies were borne up just in time to fit two gaps at the head of the big ditch-grave for the dead under the heights of Jagai.





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